

Louis XVI- King of France

- Birth name: Louis Auguste- Birthdate: August 23, 1754 in Versailles, France; Death: January 21, 1793 in Paris France
- His older brother, who was supposed to be King, died suddenly at age 9 in 1761. Then on December 20, 1765, his father died of tuberculosis, and Louis Auguste became Dauphin (likely future king) at age 11. His mother never recovered from the family tragedies and succumbed to tuberculosis on March 13, 1767. Louis Auguste was ill prepared for the throne he was soon to inherit
- Following the death of his parents, Louis's tutors provided him with poor interpersonal skills. They excelled his shyness by teaching him that austerity was a sign of a strong character in monarchs. As a result, he presented himself as being very indecisive.
- At age 15, Louis married the 14-year-old Habsburg Archduchess Marie Antoinette of Austria. Members of the French court met the marriage with some skepticism, as they remembered a previous alliance with the Habsburgs that pulled France into the Seven Years War.
- On May 10, 1774, Louis became king at 20-years old; he was immature and lacked self-confidence. He wanted to be a good king and help his subjects, but he faced enormous debt and rising resentment towards a despotic monarchy. Louis lacked sufficient strength of character and decisiveness to combat the influence of court factions or give support to reformers in their efforts to improve France's government.
- In early years of his reign, Louis XVI focused on religious uniformity and foreign policy. He invoked an edict that granted French non-Catholics legal status and the right to openly practice their faith.
- He backed the American colonies' fight for independence from France's archenemy Great Britain. However, the policy of taking out international loans and not raising taxes increased the debt and drove the country to near bankruptcy by the mid-1780s. This forced the king to support radical fiscal reforms not favorable with the nobles or the people.
- When the pressure to fix the economic problems grew, Louis became distant and shy. He posed no solution to the problem, and not responding to others who offered to help. His failure to address France's problems set in motion the Revolution that would eventually descend upon him. He made matters worse by often escaping to more pleasurable activities like hunting and locksmithing.
- By 1789, the situation was deteriorating rapidly. To address the fiscal crisis, Louis XVI convened the Estates General. By June, the Third Estate declared itself the National Assembly. At first, Louis declared the Assembly null and void, and called out the army to restore order. Public dissension grew and a National Guard formed to resist the King's actions. By July 1789, he was forced to acknowledge the National Assembly's authority.
- At first, it seemed that Louis would be able to calm the masses, saying he would accept their demand. Unfortunately, he took bad advice from his nobles and wife. He talked reform but resisted demands for it.
- The royal family was forcibly transferred from Versailles to Paris on October 6, 1789. Louis ignored advice to abdicate (give up) his responsibilities, and then agreed to a disastrous attempt to escape. He and his family were brought back to Paris, and he lost all credibility as a monarch.
- In the final two years of his reign, events moved rapidly. In the fall of 1791, Louis XVI tied his hopes on the doubtful prospect of war with Austria in hopes that a military defeat would pave the way for a restoration of his authority. War broke out in April 1792.
- Suspicions of treason led to the capture of the royal palace and the temporary suspension of the King's powers.
- On September 21, 1792, the Legislative Assembly proclaimed the First French Republic. That November, proof of Louis XVI's secret dealings and counter-revolutionary intrigues was discovered, and he and his family were charged with treason. Louis was soon found guilty by the National Assembly and condemned to death.
- On January 21, 1793, Louis was guillotined in the Place de la Revolution.